

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
FRANCILLE FIREBAUGH  
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SEPTEMBER 29, 2013\*

Q. Do you want to talk about your childhood a little bit?

A. We're starting way back. I was born in 1933 in southern Arkansas and raised in Arkansas. I was born with a cleft palate; my parents took me to Shreveport, Louisiana, and to Little Rock, but they didn't choose to do the surgery. It was repaired in Arkansas in a very tiny town (Prescott) by Dr. Buchanan who had a reputation of doing wonderful surgery. And I'm pretty sure he was not a surgeon, but he did a very good job. I was fortunate. My grandmother helped feed me before the surgery. I'm fortunate. My father was a principal of a school in the vicinity. We moved to Fayetteville, where the University of Arkansas is located, and my dad graduated from there in 1937. He was employed by the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension. We moved around as he progressed in his career. We were living in Little Rock when I completed the fifth grade and we moved to Osceola, fifty miles north of Memphis on the Mississippi River. In Little Rock they had advanced me a half year. When we got to Osceola, they said, "We don't know what to do with her." It was a small town and they certainly didn't have half-year promotions. My mother said, "I don't think she should be skipping another half year." So I re-did the last half of the fifth grade and was miserable. The school was considerably behind the Little Rock school system.

I graduated from the Osceola High School and went to Arkansas State University for one year because of an agreement with my parents, especially my mother. She didn't want me to go so far away (across the state with no direct roads via the northern route) to the University of Arkansas my first year. I did that with the understanding that I would transfer to the U of A

my sophomore year, which I did. I should tell you before I go into all of that, I had a sister, three years older than I, and six years later I had a brother, and nine years later another sister.

Q. Wow, that's a huge difference.

A. In spite of the age differences we were and are a very close family. So I went to the University, and there I studied in the School of Home Economics. There I met some very strong women on the faculty and in the Dean of Women's Office. The Director of the school was an especially strong person whom I admired. She's the one who said, when I must have been entering my senior year or somewhere along the lines, she said, "We send our girls to the University of Tennessee for their master's degree and you should go. The application is on the bulletin board outside my office." So I did that.

After my freshman year and again after my junior year, I participated in a program sponsored by the Danforth Foundation. For the summer after the junior year, I joined a fellow home economics student from each state for two weeks in St. Louis also sponsored by the Foundation and by the Ralston Purina Company (Danforth-owned, as I recall). That was followed by two weeks at Camp Miniwanca, a leadership camp on Lake Michigan (where I had also gone after my freshman year). While in St. Louis, we had a trip to Barnes Hospital (the only time I've ever watched a surgery), and we met with some dieticians whose work was so impressive, I thought they're going to save the world. When I returned to the U. of A. where I was majoring in Home Economics Education, I told my adviser that I wanted to have a double major. She helped me with the complexities of scheduling, and then after my first laboratory course in institutional management, I decided dietetics was probably not for me. But I finished the requirement. At the U of A I was particularly active in the Baptist Student Union religious group and in organizations in home economics.

I was a resident advisor in a freshman dorm for a year. And then I worked in an agricultural economics research lab doing calculations that would all be done now by computer. After I graduated, I had a job that summer teaching home economics in the high school in Dyess, Arkansas. They didn't have school in the spring, so the students could chop cotton and then they had classes in the summer. And they didn't have classes in the fall when the students could pick cotton. So I taught there that summer, and I guess my only claim to fame is, that one weekend a student said, "Are you going to stay for the weekend?" And I said, "No, I'm going home." She said, "Well, did you know that Johnny is coming?" I didn't know about Johnny Cash in his early years. His sister was in my class. I didn't stay.

Dyess is an interesting town where the families had received 40 acres and a mule during the Depression (the mules were gone by 1954 when I was there) and a house. Part of my responsibility was to do home visits. After about the second visit I realized all the houses were alike, except maybe one was turned a different way from the other. And they had made a mistake and built two houses on some of the 40 acres, so some of the houses were never level. It was a very interesting experience!

I did my Master's at Tennessee, and my advisor was a University of Chicago graduate who had studied family economics. It was a twelve-month program, if you really hustled. So I did. But I knew I needed a job. There were openings at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. The University of Texas Austin didn't pay for instructors to come for interviews. I didn't have funds to go from Knoxville, Tennessee, to Austin. But the University of Alabama paid for me to go for an interview. Tuscaloosa seemed so Southern, I thought, "I don't know if this is the place for me." I talked to someone who had taught at the University of Tennessee and the University of Texas, and I decided Texas

sounded more exciting and I took the position sight unseen. I taught at the University of Texas for two years (1956-58) and loved it. But I looked around and thought, “If I want to be in higher education, I should get a PhD – there was a difference in the faculty with Master’s degrees and PhD degrees, who did research.

I applied for graduate school at Iowa State and Cornell. Iowa State offered me a really nice fellowship, but the professors at Arkansas and Tennessee whom I respected the most, were Cornell grads. So I thought, I could have an assistantship at Cornell, and I think that’s the better choice. A professor I had known at Tennessee was then on the faculty at Cornell (Mary Purchase) [and she was] a wonderful friend, who said “Now if you decide to go to Cornell I’ll take you there.” So she drove me there from Arkansas.

I was at Cornell for four years (1958-1962) and my major was in Household Economics and Management with a minor in Human Development and Industrial Psychology. I was interested in work, especially of women’s work in the home. In my third year at Cornell I sat around the fireplace after dinner at the home of one of our professors with another grad student and the professor. We (the two graduate students) decided we would choose where we would like to be. We went across the U.S., and I chose Ohio State because someone I knew (Ruth Deacon, also a Cornell PhD graduate) was on the OSU faculty. I thought she was doing some good research and she had quite a bit of time dedicated to research. I thought that sounded good. Somehow, and it seems like a matter of months, Ohio State had an opening. They contacted me and I came out for an interview. I was offered the job and accepted it with the understanding that I would not come until after I completed my PhD.

So that’s what I did. And let’s see, I’m trying to think about the summers during my time at Cornell (I always needed money). One summer I taught at the University of Tennessee.

When I graduated, I was offered a short-term position at the University of Puget Sound [UPS], and I wanted to go to the World's Fair in Seattle. Ohio State (Dorothy D. Scott, the School Director) let me come a few days late and I thoroughly enjoyed teaching at UPS and going to the Fair.

At Ohio State I first had a 100-percent research appointment with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center at Wooster, with the home economics work done in Columbus at OSU. I said, "I can't stay if I can't teach." That's what you do at the University. Teaching was added to my appointment and I stayed. After I was at Ohio State for two years, Marshall University (Huntington, West Virginia) invited me to teach a summer course. And once more Dr. Scott, whom I greatly admired, came through. She said, "Oh, we consider Marshall University a feeder for our graduate program. That's a good idea." I taught there, and Ms. Blenko (of the Blenko Glass Co. family) was in my class. She gave me a piece of experimental piece of glass, which I still enjoy.

First at OSU I mostly did graduate teaching. I had grad students whom I very much enjoyed. I have kept up with quite a few of them. They were good. And they've done some very interesting things. Ruth Deacon and I worked together on family resource management, developing a framework that was heavily systems-theory-based. We wrote a textbook that we revised twice. John Firebaugh and I married in 1970. He was employed by the federal government here in Columbus. In 1973 I became Director of the School of Home Economics. Ruth Deacon, a year or two later, went to Iowa State and became the Dean there. It was good for both of us – we both enjoyed administration.

When I became Director of the School, my predecessor was a strong woman, but I didn't like her style of administration. I did like one thing she did: At that time the School of

Economics was in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics. The Dean, Roy Kottman, explained to the new director: “The faculty in Home Economics provide cookies and serve coffee and cookies for the faculty meetings.” And she said, “No, we’re not going to do that anymore.”

Q. Yes, I have a whole list of questions. We can go through it. Would that help?

A. I’ll talk about something and then we should go to your questions.

A. In 1978 John had an appointment in Afghanistan. It was supposed to be two years, and I decided to ask for a 14-month leave of absence without pay, and it was improved. Lena Bailey served as Acting Director while I was gone. In Afghanistan we lived in a remote site. I was there for a year. (John was there several months before I arrived.) The Russians began moving in, and finally we were evacuated. It was an interesting time. We did some travel while there; early on we spent a month in India and Sri Lanka and I stayed on and worked at the University of Agra for a month. We travelled to China before we were evacuated to Nepal. I’ll stop there. That was 1979.

Q. You told me you had siblings. When and where were they born?

A. All of us were born in Arkansas. My older sister was born in 1930 – must have been in El Dorado. My brother was born in Paragould in 1939 and my younger sister was born in 1942 – must have been in Little Rock.

Q. Where were you born again?

A. I was born in El Dorado, which is in south Arkansas.

Q. And you said you were close with your siblings?

A. We were and are very close.

Q. What are their names?

A. My older sister is Ann, my brother is James or Jim, and my younger sister is Rose.

Q. Okay. What were your house and your neighborhood like when you were growing up? You moved around a lot.

A. Well, in Little Rock (Pulaski Heights), all I can remember is a long, downhill driveway because I was riding a scooter down it and fell and cut my knee. In Osceola, we lived in a rental house until I was almost ready to go to college. My father had two brothers who were carpenters. They came and built the house.

Q. Oh wow, that was cool. Probably a lot of work. Who were the significant adults involved in your upbringing? Your parents or grandparents?

A. Certainly my parents who were marvelous. My grandmother, my maternal grandmother was another one of the strong women I've known and someone I was very close to. Her husband died at 52 years of age, and she was left with debts and the farm and she managed to educate their four children and get out of debt. Another person who was really influential was my high school home economics teacher, who I thought was very bright and a very good teacher. I'm sure that's what influenced my decision to major in home economics. And then I had at least one Sunday school teacher who influenced me. Let's see, who else? I think for the fifth grade on, those are the major ones.

Q. Do you remember any important traditions your family had?

A. Oh, my. I should start with Christmas, because we spent every Christmas with my maternal grandmother. She lived not quite 200 miles away. Along with the hunting dog who travelled in the trunk of the car with a board to let in the air, the four children and my parents made the trip in a Chevrolet (sometimes two-door and later four-door). The house seemed to hold everyone – other families with our cousins also came. There was a sleeping porch for the summer, but

when it was Christmas time, all areas were used. When going back years later, the house is not nearly as large as we saw it as children. From the benefits of the hunting, we would have fried quail for breakfast with biscuits and gravy, which has to be the best of meals. Another ritual came after the men returned from hunting: The dog or dogs got to come into the house in front of the fireplace. We certainly celebrated birthdays, and it was that person's favorite cake that was baked by my mother. I guess practically a ritual, we always went to Sunday School and church and most always to a youth program on Sunday evening in the church, and then on Wednesday night we also almost always were there for prayer meeting. It was a very, very strong religious commitment, which has been influential in my life.

Q. Were you baptized as a child or an adult?

A. Not as an infant, but in the sixth grade, I think.

Q. Do you remember that?

A. Yes.

Q. My dad grew up Baptist, so he talks about his baptism, because I can't remember mine because I was an infant. It's kind of interesting. You said you did consider your mother a role model to you?

A. She was very important, very special and she was a role model for her characteristics – strong beliefs, integrity, all of those things. She was also very smart. But I didn't imagine being a mother of four children. So she was not a role model in that sense.

Q. What did she do? Did she stay at home with you guys?

A. She did stay at home with us. Earlier, she taught school. My parents met in a stateboarding high school in Arkansas. Each of them lived in different parts of southern Arkansas where they didn't have high schools, so they went away for high school. I think while she was at that



school she did some college work. And she had enough credit to teach but she was some distance from being a graduate. She was also involved in volunteer work at the church and with PTA.

Q. Would you consider your father a role model to you?

A. Well, yes. I think in terms of his qualities of integrity and so many positive things. His professional life was, I thought, a model – he worked really, really hard. Lots of hours in the extension work with farmers and with youth. And so his really hard work, and giving so much attention to his job was an impressive thing. I thought, “That’s what professional people do.”

Q. And then growing up, what goals did you have for your future? Did you think much about it when you were younger?

A. I don’t know about when I was young. I guess I always imagined that I would go to college.

Q. Probably unusual for women at that time, wasn’t it?

A. Well, I don’t know if unusual – fewer women went to college, but my best friends from the small high school (28 in our class) went to college. There were three of us who were really close. Other women in the class? I’m not sure that I remember which ones (if any) went to college. I saw one of those other two friends this summer. Other goals? I think I imagined being married, even though I didn’t imagine having a major family.

Q. You didn’t want kids?

A. I didn’t have that [feeling] as, “I can’t wait until I have children.”

Q. Do you have any children?

A. No. John and I married when we were 37. Well, no, I should say John was 36 ½. He married an older woman.

Q. What was your college experience like? Did you like it in college?

A. Well, I didn't really like my first year at Arkansas State, which has become a much better university now. I thought my Chemistry class was like a high school class. The only thing I really liked – there was a course in World History. The University of Arkansas was a beautiful campus and was much stronger as an institution with a lot of good things. At both Arkansas and Tennessee, their libraries were not as good as they should have been. Of course, now they're much better.

Q. They've probably improved them all.

A. And at Tennessee my major professor was quite strong, and the Dean of the College was what some called a war horse of the period. She built the program in a terrific way. That was during the time when Home Economics had very strong women who developed the program, and who had to stand up against their male colleagues. I admired them.

Q. At that time especially. And then did you like Cornell?

A. Of course. I loved Cornell – the faculty, the students, and the friends – and it's incredibly beautiful. It's gorgeous. I was happy to go back for twenty years as Dean of my old college, and then to the Provost and President's Office.

Q. Do you keep in touch with them still?

A. A few faculty from my doctoral years are still alive, including my dissertation adviser, whom I see whenever I return to Ithaca. I keep in touch with a number of the fellow graduate students and friends.

Q. These questions are about reproductive history and work. What were your attitudes as a young woman about dating and pre-marital sex?

A. I guess I would say that growing up my attitude about premarital sex was very negative. I didn't date in high school. I dated some in college, some at the University of Texas, some, well, quite a bit more at Cornell.

Q. Could you tell me about those relationships you had? Did you have any serious ones before your husband?

A. A few along the way. But only one besides John, was really serious for me – but not as serious for him. At Cornell I was good friends with a group of physicists with whom I regularly ate at the cafeteria in the Home Ec Building. I dated one of them, but that didn't really go anywhere. We've remained good friends.

Q. And then how did you meet John?

A. On the Buckeye Hiking Trail.

Q. That's neat. Were you aware of lesbianism or homosexuality?

A. Actually in high school, I don't think there was ever anyone who was known to be gay or lesbian or "queer," we probably would have said. There certainly must have been gay and lesbian people in the small high school, but no one ever came out of the closet.

Q. That's interesting. We've talked about your different jobs. At work were your aspirations and abilities taken seriously? And what opportunities existed for advancement? It sounds like you were taken seriously.

A. Yes. I certainly was given opportunities for advancement. I guess there were simply things that either I was encouraged to do or that I sought.

Q. Did you feel that being a woman presented obstacles to your advancement?

A. I think it was more being associated with a women's field, being from Home Economics, which was not viewed as a strong academic area. And I think that was more of a limit, more

than being a woman. The good news is, the Human Ecology program at Cornell is now incredibly strong. It was strong when I was there, and it's even stronger now. And then here, what a disappointment when it was combined with Education.

Q. Is it still or did they break away?

A. No, they broke away from Ag [the College of Agriculture] years ago, and then were a College of Human Ecology, and now they're a Department in the College of Education and Human Ecology. I'm certainly friends [with] and know the Dean relatively well. I respect her and like her, but I don't like the combination of Education and Human Ecology. That sounds pretty strong. It did not feel to me that it was a marriage made in heaven. Human Ecology has stronger scientific relationships than most of Education.

Q. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment or sexual discrimination at work?

A. I don't think by any definition I have, unless one thinks of the limitations of coming from a woman's field as sexual discrimination.

Q. That's great. What kind of community projects have you done?

A. At what point? Anywhere?

Q. I think anywhere. Let's say in Ithaca.

A. I was on the Board of the hospital for ten years. I was the first President of the Community Foundation there. I was on the Board for ten years of Ithaca College. And I was on the Board of Kendal at Ithaca [a retirement community and continuing care facility] for eight years.

While at Cornell I joined the Board of Zamorano University, a Pan-American university located in Honduras – I'm now an Emerita member of the Board. I also joined the Board of Families and Work Institute in New York while at Cornell. Here in Columbus I've been the President of the First Community Village Residence Council, which is called – are you ready

for this? – the mayor. So I’ve been the mayor. Let’s see. John and I co-chaired a major revision of the constitution of the First Congregational Church. I’m on a committee there for pastoral relations and I worked on the long-range planning committee. Then I’m associated with The Ohio State University Retirees Association; I was on their Board for a term. And then last year I was President of the Torch Club, which is kind of a town /gown organization. We meet monthly during the academic year at the Faculty Club.

Q. Where is the Faculty Club?

A. Do you know where the Geology Building is?

Q. Yes.

A. It’s next to the Geology Building.

Q. I always wondered what that building was. It’s a really nice looking building and I thought, “I’ve never had a class in there.” You’ve done a lot of things. That’s great, though. How do you and John allocate roles and responsibilities concerning family finances?

A. John does most of the investing. Other than that, our other financial decisions, I’d say, are shared.

Q. How do you divide up responsibilities in your home?

A. I think John is in there cooking for us. Here at First Community Village we have what I call a meal allowance, and we can have one party at the beginning of the month and spend it all, or we can spend it during the month. So we don’t have a meal-a-day plan or something like that. Some retirement complexes have that. We do some of our own cooking. Last night John made tomato soup and he cooked the black eyed peas. I made muffins and cooked the greens and made a sauce.

Q. Kind of a shared thing. When you were living by yourself and then got married and lived with him, did things change a lot for you?

A. They changed before we were married I had a house that we eventually bought, but another faculty member would often live in the same house with me. Maybe for two years or something like that. And so when there was someone there, we had lots of shared responsibilities. I had a cleaning person before we were married. We had a cleaning person after we were married. I load the dishwasher and John empties it.

Q. That's nice. That's a good system. Do you recall stories about your mother and grandmother from when they grew up? What time period did your mother grow up in?

A. My mother was born in 1906 and died in 1999 – she had three siblings. The only thing I remember about stories from her growing up were the ways of getting to grade school, mostly it was by buggy. She grew up in the country. My father was born in 1901 and died in 1987. He grew up in quite a large family. I don't remember how many there were, but he a lot of siblings. And they had a farm and lots of hard work and pretty limited income.

Q. Yes, especially with that many kids.

A. And I think daddy worked his way through high school and paid for all his education.

Q. Did he go to college?

A. Oh yes, he graduated in '37 from the University of Arkansas.

Q. And then he was a principal?

A. He was a principal and then he worked with the cooperative extension [service] with the University of Arkansas.

Q. And then do you remember any stories from your grandmother? She probably would have been born in the late 1800s, is that right?

A. She was born in 1876 and died in 1974. I can tell you, she had a story about during the Civil War when her family didn't have salt and couldn't buy it. And from the smokehouse where hams were hung and cured, they took up the sawdust and boiled out the salt. The salt had dripped onto the sawdust-covered floor.

Q. That's crazy. Did your father or grandfather fight in wars? Do you remember?

A. No. My father missed the wars because of his age. I don't know why my grandfather missed going to World War I – he was born in 1878 and died in 1929, so he would have been 36 when World War I started.

Q. Oh, they were in between them? That's interesting. And then do you know how the Depression in the '30s affected your family?

A. Daddy's salary with the school must have been cut some, but my mother always said she had more hired help during the Depression than any other time in her marriage. I suppose they just had more money than most.

Q. That's neat. Were you very aware of what was going on politically when you grew up?

A. Sure, in the South I grew up with segregation. Of course, the high school was all white. The colored or African Americans had their school. It was really a sad time. We never had any, what I would call social interchange. And then when I went to Cornell in 1958, it was not long after the Little Rock forced integration or desegregation in 1957, and when someone learned that I was from Arkansas, they would tell me every solution for what should be done. Oh, please, if it were that easy, I think we would have taken care of that long ago. And then when I came to Columbus and lived in Arlington, the person who owned the house (Eva D. Wilson), an OSU faculty member whom I greatly admired, was working in Brazil. OSU had lots of international programs and she was in Brazil for an extended time. The next-door neighbor,

I'm sure it was after a drink, that neighbor said, "How's that Eva doing down there with the spics?" And I had never heard the word – I felt it must be a very negative, a pejorative term. Upper Arlington had clauses in the house deeds that you couldn't sell to an African American. I don't know when that was removed, but the climate in UA was not one that welcomed people of color.

Q. And this is, like, '70s?

A. Yes, isn't that something? I thought "I guess this isn't quite the perfect place here." It was certainly not perfect in Arkansas. And now, in a strange way, some of it seems much more easy-going there today. But the schools where I grew up serve poor white children and African Americans, and the other children go to private schools, if at all possible. In areas where there is a higher proportion of white children, they go to public schools.

Q. Change takes a long time. How were you and your family affected by World War II? You would have been, like, ten-ish?

A. We were still in Little Rock during part of that time. I remember the air raid drill and getting under the dining table at home. And if it was during school, getting under a desk or under a table. And I remember rationing of food and of gas. We had only one favorite cousin who was killed in the war, But mostly the family was "in between" wars.

Q. That's interesting. And then, when was the war over? It started in '45?

A. No, that's about when it ended.

Q. So then it ended when you were pretty young still?

Q. And then, we talked about the civil rights things? You remember, you were in Cornell when civil rights [demonstrations] and segregation were happening?

A. Yes. No, no, I went to Cornell in '58, and so it was more like '56-'57 and longer.



Q. Did you follow it on the news?

A. Yes.

Q. What were your thoughts about it at that time?

A. That it was going to be a long haul.

Q. And then did any of the social movements in the 1960s influence you?

A. By '69 I was on kind of a sabbatical leave and I was not at Ohio State when they had riots or when they closed the campus. And I remember I was speaking at the University of Delaware and I got a call that whatever the venue was, it wouldn't be there. I would be speaking somewhere in a house. That was during the time when the Delaware campus was closed.

Q. They shut down off-campus?

A. They shut down the campus. I felt a bit on the fringe because I was off campus most of the time – I went around the world on my leave and stopped to work in India for a month and returned after Christmas for another three months. So I was just sort of distant from the riots and upheavals.

Q. Probably not a bad thing. Are there any women's issues or political concerns that have been important to you in the past few decades?

A. LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] issues have certainly been important, and I am pleased that Equality Ohio is active. Another organization we have supported does a lot of education about bullying and GBLT issues. John and I helped sponsor a fund raiser for that. That's been kind of a deep concern of mine. How else did you phrase it? Any other social issues?

Q. Women's issues or political issues?

A. I guess more in Ithaca, I was certainly a supporter of Planned Parenthood. Really, pro-choice and those sorts of things are important to me.

Q. How did those things come to be important to you?

A. Just using one's mind.

Q. That's how I feel too. That's funny. And then, so growing up you didn't know any LGBT kids? Did you meet any in college? Past college?

A. You know, it's very interesting. I don't even think at Cornell, grad school, that I knew any. No, I don't think I did. Of course, being back at Cornell as Dean, there were faculty members who were gay. I knew them well. I worked in the Provost's and President's office at Cornell and as a Vice Provost, I worked closely with Biddy Martin, the Provost, who was openly gay. We remain friends. At Ohio State when I was in the Provost's Office, even when I left in 1988, LGBT issues were receiving limited public attention. It is sort of shocking now to think that, but honestly, I don't really remember major things happening.

Q. It's kind of a more recent social movement. That's interesting.

A. If you look at the facts, lots of things were probably going on. I simply was not involved.

Q. Right, right, yes. Are there any women in the media or pop culture that have influenced you?

A. No, except Judy Woodruff [a television news anchor and journalist] is on the Families and Work Institute Board. I like her, I admire her and her ideas. She's the one I think of.

Q. That's neat. Looking back over your life, what have been some of the most important changes you have experienced?

A. I suppose, "retirement" was one of the most important changes. I think I had four or five retirements between OSU and Cornell. John says that I did that because they give such nice

parties. I retired from Ohio State, and then at least three times at Cornell. I would retire and then I would do something else.

And here, I've got to tell you quickly about my project, because I have been working on it for so long, on the portrayal of women at work in 17th-19th century paintings. At Cornell, the Museum of Art reported to me. I got to know the Director really well. He is a Dutch Golden Age specialist. He helped me a lot and with the Internet you can find everything. I've been writing on it what seems like forever. It's been a major effort.

Yes, I'm retired but I have all these commitments. And I keep thinking, "Well, someday I'm going to be sitting in a rocking chair and I'm going to be just reading books and taking a nap." It hasn't quite happened that way. At Cornell I had a phased retirement.

Q. That's probably a nice way to do it.

A. It was very nice. And I've done some consulting after that. The best one was at the University of South Pacific in Fiji. I've gone twice. The death of my parents was a very big event.

Q. How old were you when that happened?

A. I was 54 when Daddy died, and 66 when Mama died. They lived long lives. Of course, marriage was an adjustment but not anything like I imagined, since we were both mature adults. So that wasn't quite the same as for couples in their 20s or so. Okay, now, anything else?

Q. Are you going to write a book about the paintings?

A. That's what I'm trying to do. Oh my gosh, it's so strange because much of the other things I've published have been a result of research. It's a different kind of writing. I should be an art historian! I've just learned so much. However I do it, it will be very expensive because there

are 78 paintings, and the copyright permissions will be costly. Even though a lot of them are no longer copyrighted, to get the photograph you want from the museums will still be costly.

Q. That would be neat. Have your views on women's roles changed over your life?

A. I think so. I think that whether or not women can really have it all, or lean in, remains a question. I think it's still impressive that many women have families, have children, and do a lot of great things. And so I think that's something that I admire. Improved child care has helped women in all economic "classes" to be employed with less strain about care.

Q. In what ways do you feel your life course most differed from or resembled that of your mother?

A. Well, it was very different. As I say, she had four children, so that was very different. And she didn't graduate from college. She wasn't employed outside the home, except when she did some part-time work.

Q. What did she do when all you guys left? When all the kids left?

A. She just kept doing what she was doing. I think that may be when she did some part-time work. She was a great seamstress and she did some alterations for a store. So that may have been after that. But she just always had lots of things to do, and she did lots of canning and freezing.

Q. That's neat. What did your older sister do?

A. My older sister married right after high school, and they had three children. She did not go to college, and she's probably the smartest one of us. But she takes courses sometimes at the community college, even now. Her first husband died in a plane crash and her second husband died from a kidney disease. The children are all college grads. She's a very happy grandmother and great-grandmother and often travels to see them.

Q. Does she live in Columbus?

A. Oh no, she's in Arkansas.

Q. What about your brother and other sister?

A. My brother went to the University of Arkansas and to a seminary in Fort Worth. And then at 40 he left his position in a church and decided to go into a business. His wife was a school teacher and they have two children. His daughter did a doctorate at Vanderbilt – Peabody, and she, I'm pleased to say, is an Associate Dean in the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Their son is in the exterminating business.

And then my younger sister graduated from the University of Arkansas in Home Economics and married someone who went to medical school and then to Duke for nuclear medicine and radiology. They were in Louisville for a long time. And they had a winter place in Tucson. He decided that the medical field is not what he entered, and so at 55 or so he left it, and they moved to Tucson. We all took bets that it's too hot there in the summer, so they have a house on Cumberland Lake in Kentucky. They have a son whose Ph.D is from Stanford and a daughter with an MBA from Indiana U.

Q. And are you still really close with them?

A. Yes. The last story. For my 80th birthday, my sibling and their spouses, seven nieces and nephews met John and me in Fayetteville. John and I had a dinner party and then a friend of Rose had a very nice brunch. Then we went to Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville. Alice Walton gave millions to build it and to buy art for it. She's one of the richest women around. Well, anyway, it was a fantastic thing that she did.

Q. That's nice. This is just out of curiosity. How do you like Ohio compared to the South where you grew up?

A. We liked Columbus enough to move back. We still have friends here. Some of the attitudes that I moved away from in the South still exist. It's always interesting to go back and to see progress. For the most part, and my siblings and I are very much closer in our views, and my brother in Little Rock is pretty progressive. The people that I see have attitudes similar to mine, but I don't see many people!

Q. Right. Those are all my questions.

A. I would hope so. That goes on forever, your recorder?

Q. It does. I'll turn it off.

Editor: In reviewing this transcript, Firebaugh notes that on page 18, when discussing people she might have known from college and graduate school as being LGBT, she remembered that one of her roommates in a graduate dorm was from the Netherlands, and once when visiting her in the Netherlands, Firebaugh met her partner of many years, even though the roommate had never told Firebaugh she was a lesbian.